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RUEHRB/AMEMBASSY RABAT PRIORITY 0446
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RUEHTU/AMEMBASSY TUNIS PRIORITY 0531
RUEHVT/AMEMBASSY VALLETTA PRIORITY 0901
RUEHFL/AMCONSUL FLORENCE PRIORITY 3758
RUEHMIL/AMCONSUL MILAN PRIORITY 0190
RUEHNP/AMCONSUL NAPLES PRIORITY 3966
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C O N F I D E N T I A L ROME 000967

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 08/21/2019

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SUBJECT: BERLUSCONI TO VISIT LIBYA FOR "FRIENDSHIP DAY"
AUGUST 30

REF: ROME 205

Classified By: A/Political Counselor Liam J. Wasley for reasons 1.4 (b)
and (d).

11. (C) Prime Minister Berlusconi is scheduled to visit Libya to celebrate the first anniversary of the signing of the Italy-Libya Friendship Treaty. The treaty established August 30th as Libya-Italy "Friendship Day" and Berlusconi will participate in several events marking the day. According to the press, Berlusconi will meet with Libyan leader Qadhafi to discuss several parts of the treaty, including the issue of Italian fishing boats in Libyan waters and migration issues in light of the growing UNHCR concerns about treatment of returnees. The Italian Air Force acrobatic team, the Frecce Tricolori, announced it will fly over the Piazza Verde in Tripoli on September 1st for the 40th anniversary of Libyan "Revolution Day" which commemorates Qadhafi's seizure of power. This will be the third high-profile meeting between Berlusconi and Qadhafi in as many months -- a state visit in June, the G8 Summit in L'Aquila, and now this commemoration. Post finds all the Italian attention to these anniversaries to be "way over the top" and even questions the rationale for the involvement of the Frecce Tricolori.

12. (C) The treaty was initially signed on August 30, 2008 in Benghazi but not officially ratified by both countries until spring 2009. It formally established a legal framework to enable the two countries to develop a "special and privileged partnership." (see reftel). The treaty commits Italy to spend 5 billion USD over 20 years in infrastructure projects in Libya. These projects are to be awarded to Italian firms. Post views this treaty as a way for Italy to put pressure on the Libyans to stem the tide of illegal migration from Africa that flows from Libyan shores and offers Italian firms lucrative access to the Libyan market. There has been little visible progress on the much publicized large infrastructure project of building a coastal highway across Libya and this issue could very easily be another topic of discussion for the two leaders on August 30.

13. (C) The GOI hoped that joint patrols of the Libyan coast, which began in May 2009, would slow the tide of migrants, which is heaviest in the warmer months. In fact, illegal immigration from Libya--primarily sub-Saharan and other non-Libyans using Libya as a transit point--has dropped off dramatically. While seaborne migration is a small percentage of illegal immigration to Italy, the GOI has made putting a

stop to it a major priority, and the boats of migrants frequently get top billing on the evening news.

14. (C) Seaborne migration returned to the press on August 20, when five immigrants in a rubber boat were rescued, but reported that 75 of their companions had perished during their 20-day period at sea. Amnesty International and UNHCR have expressed concerns over the Libyan police's handling of those migrants that Italian authorities have handed over to Libya under the terms of the treaty, asserting that Libya does not guarantee full interviews to ascertain asylum claims. Italian MOI contacts reject the criticism, telling us this is a Libyan domestic issue.

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